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SOME EXPERIENCES OF AN IRISH R.M.

BY E. Œ. SOMERVILLE AND MARTIN ROSS

No. IV.—THE WATERS OF STRIFE

I KNEW Bat Callaghan's face long before I was able to put a name to it. There was seldom a court day in Skebawn that I was not aware of his level brows and superfluously intense expression somewhere among the knot of corner-boys who patronised the weekly sittings of the bench of magistrates. His social position appeared to fluctuate: I have seen him driving a car; he sometimes held my horse for me—that is to say, he sat on the counter of a public-house while the Quaker slumbered in the gutter; and, on one occasion, he retired, at my bidding, to Cork Jail, there to meditate upon the inadvisability of defending a friend from the attentions of the police with the tailboard of a cart.

He next obtained prominence in my regard at a regatta held under the auspices of 'The Sons of Liberty,' a local football club that justified its title by the patriot green of its jerseys and its free interpretation of the rules of the game. The announcement of my name on the posters as a patron—a privilege acquired at the cost of a reluctant half-sovereign—made it incumbent on me to put in an appearance, even though the festival coincided with my Petty Sessions day at Skebawn; and at some five of the clock on a brilliant September afternoon I found myself driving down the stony road that dropped in zigzags to the borders of the lake on which the races were to come off.

I believe that the selection of Lough Lonen as the scene of the regatta was not unconnected with the fact that the secretary of the club owned a public-house at the cross roads at one end of it; none the less, the president of the Royal Academy could

scarcely have chosen more picturesque surroundings. A mountain towered steeply up from the lake's edge, dark with the sad green of beech-trees in September: fir woods followed the curve of the shore, and leaned far over the answering darkness of the water; and above the trees rose the toppling steepnesses of the hill, painted with a purple glow of heather. The lake was about a mile long, and, tumbling from its further end, a fierce and narrow river fled away west to the sea, some four or five miles off.

I had not seen a boat race since I was at Oxford, and the words still called up before my eyes a vision of smart parasols, of gorgeous barges, of snowy-clad youths, and of low slim outriggers, winged with the level flight of oars, slitting the water to the sway of the line of flat backs. Certainly undreamed-of possibilities in aquatics were revealed to me as I reined in the Quaker on the outskirts of the crowd, and saw below me the festival of the Sons of Liberty in full swing. Boats of all shapes and sizes, outrageously overladen, moved about the lake, with oars flourishing to the strains of concertinas. Black swarms of people seethed along the water's edge, congesting here and there round the dingy tents and stalls of green apples; and the club's celebrated brass band, enthroned in a wagonette, and stimulated by the presence of a barrel of porter on the box-seat, was belching forth 'The Boys of Wexford,' under the guidance of a disreputable ex-militia drummer, in a series of crashing discords.

Almost as I arrived a pistol-shot set the echoes clattering round the lake, and three boats burst out abreast from the throng into the open water. Two of the crews were in shirt-sleeves, the third wore the green jerseys of the football club. The boats were of the heavy sea-going build, and pulled six oars apiece, oars of which the looms were scarcely narrower than the blades, and were, of the two, a shade heavier. None the less the rowers started dauntlessly at thirty-five strokes a minute, quickening up, incredible as it may seem, as they rounded the mark boat in the first lap of the two-mile course. The rowing was, in general style, more akin to the action of beating up eggs with a fork than to any other form of athletic exercise; but in its unorthodox way it kicked the heavy boats along at a surprising pace. The oars squeaked and grunted against the thole-pins, the coxswains kept up an unceasing flow of oratory, and superfluous little boys in punts contrived to intervene at all the more critical turning-points of the race, only evading the flail of the oncoming oars by

performing prodigies of 'waggling' with a single oar at the stern. I took out my watch and counted the strokes when they were passing the mark boat for the second time; they were pulling a fraction over forty; one of the shirt-sleeved crews was obviously in trouble, the other, with humped backs and jerking oars, was holding its own against the green jerseys amid the blended yells of friends and foes. When for the last time they rounded the green flag there were but two boats in the race, and the foul that had been imminent throughout was at length achieved with a rattle of oars and a storm of curses. They were clear again in a moment, the shirt-sleeved crew getting away with a distinct lead, and it was at about this juncture that I became aware that the coxswains had abandoned their long-handled tillers, and were standing over their respective strokes, shoving frantically at their oars, and maintaining the while a ceaseless bawl of encouragement and defiance. It looked like a foregone conclusion for the leaders, and the war of cheers rose to frenzy. The word 'cheering,' indeed, is but an euphuism, and in no way expresses the serrated yell, composed of epithets, advice, and imprecations, that was flung like a live thing at the oncoming boats. The green jerseys answered to this stimulant with a wild spurt that drove the bow of their boat within a measurable distance of

'MORE POWER TO YE, LARRY, ME OWLD DARLIN'!'

their opponents' stroke oar. In another second a thoroughly successful foul would have been effected, but the cox of the leading boat proved himself equal to the emergency by unshipping his tiller, and with it dealing 'bow' of the green jerseys such a blow over the head as effectually dismissed him from the sphere of practical politics.

A great roar of laughter greeted this feat of arms, and a voice at my dogcart's wheel pierced the clamour:

'More power to ye, Larry, me owld darlin'!'

I looked down and saw Bat Callaghan, with shining eyes, and a face white with excitement, poising himself on one foot on the box of my wheel in order to get a better view of the race. Almost before I had time to recognise him, a man in a green jersey caught him round the legs and jerked him down. Callaghan fell into the throng, recovered himself in an instant, and rushed, white and dangerous, at his assailant. The Son of Liberty was no less ready for the fray, and what is known in Ireland as 'the father and mother of a row' was imminent. Already, however, one of those unequalled judges of the moral temperature of a crowd, a sergeant of the R.I.C., had quietly interposed his bulky person between the combatants, and the coming trouble was averted.

Elsewhere battle was raging. The race was over and the committee boat was hemmed in by the rival crews, supplemented by craft of all kinds. The 'objection' was being lodged, and in its turn objected to, and I can only liken the process to the screaming warfare of seagulls round a piece of carrion. The tumult was still at its height when out of its very heart two four-oared boats broke forth, and a pistol-shot proclaimed that another race had begun, the public interest in which was specially keen, owing to the fact that the rowers were stalwart country girls, who made up in energy what they lacked in skill. It was a short race, once round the mark boat only, and, like a successful farce, it 'went with a roar' from start to finish. Foul after foul, each followed by a healing interval of calm, during which the crews, who had all caught crabs, were recovering themselves and their oars, marked its progress; and when the two boats, locked in an inextricable embrace, at length passed the winning flag, and the crews, oblivious of judges and public, fell to untrammelled personal abuse and to doing up their hair, I decided that I had seen the best of the fun, and prepared to go home.

It was, as it happened, the last race of the day, and nothing

CALLAGHAN'S LITHE FIGURE, SLEEK AND DRIPPING

remained in the way of excitement save the greased pole with the pig slung in a bag at the end of it. My final impression of the Lough Lonen Regatta was of Callaghan's lithe figure, sleek and dripping, against the yellow sky, as he poised on the swaying pole with the broken gold of the water beneath him.

Limited as was my experience of the South-west of Ireland, I was in no way surprised to hear on the following afternoon from Peter Cadogan that there had been 'sthrokes' the night before, when the boys were going home from the regatta, and that the police were searching for one Jimmy Foley.

'What do they want him for?' I asked.

'Sure it's according as a man that was bringing a car of bog-wood was tellin' me, sir,' answered Peter, pursuing his occupation of washing the dogcart with unabated industry; 'they say Jimmy's wife went roaring to the police, saying she could get no account of her husband.'

'I suppose he's beaten some fellow and is hiding,' I suggested.

'Well, that might be, sir,' assented Peter respectfully. He plied his mop vigorously in intricate places about the springs, which would, I knew, have never been explored save for my presence.

'It's what John Hennessy was saying, that he was hard set to get his horse past Cluin Cross, the way the blood was sthrewn about the road,' resumed Peter; 'sure they were fighting like wasps in it half the night.'

'Who were fighting?'

'I couldn't say, indeed, sir. Some o' thim low rakish lads from the town, I suppose,' replied Peter with virtuous respectability.

When Peter Cadogan was quietly and intelligently candid, to pursue an inquiry was seldom of much avail.

Next day in Skebawn I met little Murray, the district inspector, very alert and smart in his rifle-green uniform, going forth to collect evidence about the fight. He told me that the police were pretty certain that one of the Sons of Liberty, named Foley, had been murdered, but, as usual, the difficulty was to get anyone to give information; all that was known was that he was gone, and that his wife had identified his cap, which had been found drenched with blood by the roadside. Murray gave it as his opinion that the whole business had arisen out of the row over the disputed race, and that there must have been a dozen people looking on when the murder was done; but so far no evidence was forthcoming, and after a day and a night of search the police had not been able to find the body.

'No,' said Flurry Knox, who had joined us, 'and if it was any of those mountainy men did away with him you might scrape Ireland with a small-tooth comb and you'll not get him!'

That evening I smoked an after-dinner cigarette out of doors in the mild starlight, strolling about the rudimentary paths of

I MET LITTLE MURRAY, THE DISTRICT INSPECTOR

what would, I hoped, some day be Philippa's garden. The bats came stooping at the red end of my cigarette, and from the covert behind the house I heard once or twice the delicate bark of a fox. Civilisation seemed a thousand miles off, as far away as the falling star that had just drawn a line of pale fire halfway down the

northern sky. I had been nearly a year at Shreelane House by myself now, and the time seemed very long to me. It was slow work putting by money, even under the austerities of Mrs. Cadogan's *régime*, and though I had warned Philippa I meant to marry her after Christmas, there were moments, and this was one of them, when it seemed an idle threat.

'Pether!' the strident voice of Mrs. Cadogan intruded upon my meditations. 'Go tell the Major his coffee is waitin' on him!'

I went gloomily into my hideous study, and, with a resignation born of adversity, swallowed the mixture of chicory and liquorice which my housekeeper possessed the secret of distilling from the best and most expensive coffee. My theory about it was that it added to the illusion that I had dined, and moreover that it kept me awake, and I generally had a good deal of writing to do after dinner.

It was eleven o'clock when I leaned back in my chair, having finished the notes I had been making on an adjourned case of 'stroke-hauling' salmon in the Lonen River; and wearied with the events of the day I dozed off. Perhaps it was the conjunction in my brain of this fishing case and Foley's strange disappearance, for in a singularly distinct vision I saw before me the banks of the stream, and some men in the attire of constables landing, not a salmon, but the body of the missing man! The scene came before me with wonderful clearness, and impressed me so mightily that I fell asleep still realising it.

I got up early next morning and drove to Skebawn to see Murray. I had made up my mind to tell him what had happened to me, trusting that his Highland blood would save him from despising the supernatural because he did not understand it. Murray was, I discovered, not in a mood to despise the supernatural, or anything else that had a suggestion to make, having been out till nine o'clock on the previous night on a fruitless search for any clue to the mystery of Jimmy Foley's disappearance.

'Well, it's worth trying, I suppose,' he admitted, 'but I may tell you the river's a good mile from the place where the fight was.'

I had sessions to attend on the extreme outskirts of my district, and could not wait, as Murray suggested, to see the thing out, but throughout the day the question as to whether or not I had made a fool of both him and myself was uncomfortably present with me. I did not get home till the following day, and when I arrived I found a letter from Murray awaiting me.

'Your dream was right. We found Foley's body knocking about against the posts of the weir. The head was wrapped in his own green jersey, and had been smashed in by a stone. We suspect a fellow named Bat Callaghan, who has bolted, but I think there were a lot of them in it. I wish you would ring up that familiar of yours again and get us another tip. The inquest will be held to-morrow.'

I re-read the letter slowly, and as I did so I knew how sceptically little I had expected the news it contained. All the psychological ambitions that had been dashed by the painful episode of Great Uncle McCarthy revived, and feeling that nothing could surprise me now, I laid out sheets of paper, and invited further developments. Surprise, however, awaited me, but in the form of total failure. James Foley refused to be rung up; the impenetrable door had closed again upon him and his secret.

The coroner's jury took a cautious view of the cause of the catastrophe, and brought in a verdict of 'death by misadventure,' and I presently found it to be my duty to call a magisterial inquiry to further investigate the matter. A few days before this was to take place, I was engaged in the delicate task of displaying to my landlord, Mr. Flurry Knox, the defects of the pantry sink, when Mrs. Cadogan advanced upon us with the information that the Widow Callaghan from Cluin would be thankful to speak to me, and had brought me a present of 'a fine young goose.'

'Is she come over here looking for Bat?' said Flurry, withdrawing his arm and the longest kitchen-ladle from the pipe that he had been probing; 'she knows you're handy at hiding your friends, Mary; maybe it's he that's stopping the drain!'

Mrs. Cadogan turned her large red face upon her late employer.

'I wish yerself was stuck in it, Master Flurry, the way ye'd hear Pether cursin' the full o' the house when he's striving to wash the things in that unnatural little trough.'

'Are you sure it's Peter does all the cursing?' retorted Flurry. 'I hear Father Scanlan has it in for you this long time for not going to confession.'

The contest might have been continued indefinitely, had I not struck up the swords with a request that Mrs. Callaghan might be sent round to the hall door. There we found a tall, grey-haired countrywoman waiting for us at the foot of the steps, in the hooded blue cloak that is peculiar to the south of Ireland; from the fact that she clutched a pocket handkerchief in her right hand I augured a stormy interview, but nothing could have been

more self-restrained and even imposing than the reverence with which she greeted Flurry and me.

'Good morning to your honours,' she began, with a dignified and extremely imminent snuffle. 'I ask your pardon for troubling you, Major Yeates, but I haven't a one in the counthry to give me an adwice, and I have no confidence only in your honour's experiments.'

'Experience she means,' prompted Flurry. 'Didn't you get advice enough out of Mr. Murray yesterday?' he went on aloud. 'I heard he was at Cluin to see you.'

'And if he was itself, it's little adwantage anyone'd get out of that little whipper-shnapper of a shnap-dhragon!' responded Mrs. Callaghan tartly; 'he was with me for a half-hour giving me every big rock of English till I had a reel in me head. I declare to ye, Mr. Flurry, after he had gone out o' the house, ye wouldn't throw three farthings for me!'

The pocket handkerchief was here utilised, after which, with a heavy groan, Mrs. Callaghan again took up her parable.

'I towld him first and last I'd lose me life if I had to go into the coort, and if I did itself sure th' attorneys could rip no more out o' me than what he did himself.'

'Did you tell him where was Bat?' inquired Flurry casually.

At this Mrs. Callaghan immediately dissolved into tears.

'Is it Bat?' she howled. 'If th' angel Gabriel came down from heaven asking me where was Bat, I could give him no satisfaction. The divil a know I know what's happened him. He came home with me sober and good-natured from the rogatta, and the next morning he axed a fresh egg for his breakfast, and God forgive me, I wouldn't break the score I was taking to the hotel, and with that he slapped the cup o' tay into the fire and went out the door, and I never got a word of him since, good nor bad. God knows 'tis I got throuble with that poor boy, and he the only one I have to look to in the world!'

I cut the matter short by asking her what she wanted me to do for her, and sifted out from amongst much extraneous detail the fact that she relied upon my renowned wisdom and clemency to preserve her from being called as a witness at the coming inquiry. The gift of the goose served its intended purpose of embarrassing my position, but in spite of it I broke to the Widow Callaghan my inability to help her. She did not, of course, believe me, but she was too well-bred to say so. In Ireland one becomes accustomed to this attitude.

As it turned out, however, Bat Callaghan's mother had nothing to fear from the inquiry. She was by turns deaf, imbecile, garrulously candid, and furiously abusive of Murray's principal witness, a frightened lad of seventeen, who had sworn to having seen Callaghan and Jimmy Foley 'shaping at one another to fight,' at an hour when, according to Mrs. Callaghan, he was 'lying sthretched on the beddeen with a sick shtomach' in consequence of the malignant character of the porter supplied by the last witness's father. It all ended, as such cases so often do in Ireland, in complete moral certainty in the minds of all concerned as to the guilt of the accused, and entire impotence on the part of the law to prove it. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Bartholomew Callaghan; and the clans of Callaghan and Foley fought rather more bloodily than usual, as occasion served; and at intervals during the next few months Murray used to ask me how James Foley was getting on, and if I had received any more communications from the Dead Letter Office, to which I was wont to reply with condolences on the failure of the R.I.C. to find the Widow Callaghan's only son for her; and that was about all that came of it.

Events with which the present story has no concern took me to England towards the end of the following March. It so happened that my old regiment, the ——th Fusiliers, was quartered at Whincastle, within a couple of hours by rail of Philippa's home, where I was staying, and, since my wedding was now within measurable distance, my former brothers-in-arms invited me over to dine and sleep, and to receive a valedictory silver claret jug that they were magnanimous enough to bestow upon a backslider. I enjoyed the dinner as much as any man can enjoy his dinner when he knows he has to make a speech at the end of it; through much and varied conversation I strove, like a nervous mother who cannot trust her offspring out of her sight, to keep before my mind's eye the opening sentences that I had composed in the train; I felt that if I could only 'get away' satisfactorily I might trust the Ayala ('89) to do the rest, and of that fount of inspiration there was no lack. As it turned out, I got away all right, though the sight of the double line of expectant faces and red mess jackets nearly scattered those precious opening sentences, and I am afraid that so far as the various subsequent points went that I had intended to make, I stayed away; however, neither Demosthenes, nor a Nationalist member at a Cork election, could have been listened to with more gratifying attention, and I sat down, hot and happy,

to be confronted with my own flushed visage, hideously reflected in the glittering paunch of the claret jug.

Once safely over the presentation, the evening mellowed into frivolity, and it was pretty late before I found myself settled down to whist, at sixpenny points, in the ancient familiar way, while most of the others fell to playing pool in the billiard-room next door. I have played whist from my youth up; with the preternatural seriousness of a subaltern, with the self-assurance of a senior captain, with the privileged irascibility of a major; and my eighteen months of abstinence at Shreelane had only whetted my appetite for what I consider the best of games. After the long lonely evenings there, with the rats for company, and, for relaxation, a 'deck' of that specially demoniacal American variety of patience, known as 'Fooly Ann,' it was wondrous agreeable to sit again among my fellows, and 'lay the longs' on a severely scientific rubber of whist, as though Mrs. Cadogan and the Skebawn Bench of Magistrates had never existed.

We were in the first game of the second rubber, and I was holding a very nice playing hand; I had early in the game moved forth my trumps to battle, and I was now in the ineffable position of scoring with the small cards of my long suit. The cards fell and fell in silence, and Ballantyne, my partner, raked in the tricks like a machine. The concentrated quiet of the game was suddenly arrested by a sharp, unmistakable sound from the barrack yard outside, the snap of a Lee-Metford rifle.

'What was that?' exclaimed Moffat, the senior major.

Before he had finished speaking there was a second shot.

'By Jove, those were rifle-shots! Perhaps I'd better go and see what's up,' said Ballantyne, who was captain of the week, throwing down his cards and making a bolt for the door.

He had hardly got out of the room when the first long high note of the 'assembly' sang out, sudden and clear. We all sprang to our feet, and as the bugle-call went shrilly on, the other men came pouring in from the billiard-room, and stampeded to their quarters to get their swords. At the same moment the mess sergeant appeared at the outer door with a face as white as his shirt-front.

'The sentry on the magazine guard has been shot, sir!' he said excitedly to Moffat. 'They say he's dead!'

We were all out in the barrack square in an instant; it was clear moonlight, and the square was already alive with hurrying figures buttoning on tunics and cramming on caps as they ran to fall in. I was a free agent these times, and I followed the mess

sergeant across the square towards the distant corner where the magazine stands. As we doubled round the end of the men's quarters, we nearly ran into a small party of men who were advancing slowly and heavily in our direction.

'"Ere he is, sir!' said the mess sergeant, stopping himself abruptly.

They were carrying the sentry to the hospital. His busby had fallen off; the moon shone mildly on his pale, convulsed face, and foam and strange inhuman noises came from his lips. His head was rolling from side to side on the arm of one of the men who was carrying him; as it turned towards me I was struck by something vaguely familiar in the face, and I wondered if he had been in my old company.

'What's his name, sergeant?' I said to the mess sergeant.

'Private Harris, sir,' replied the sergeant; 'he's only lately come up from the depôt, and this was his first time on sentry by himself.'

I went back to the mess, and in process of time the others straggled in, thirsting for whiskies-and-sodas, and full of such information as there was to give. Private Harris was not wounded; both the shots had been fired by him, as was testified by the state of his rifle and the fact that two of the cartridges were missing from the packet in his pouch.

'I hear he was a queer, sulky sort of chap always,' said Tomkinson, the subaltern of the day, 'but if he was having a try at suicide he made a bally bad fist of it.'

'He made as good a fist of it as you did of putting on your sword, Tommy,' remarked Ballantyne, indicating a dangling white strap of webbing, that hung down like a tail below Mr. Tomkinson's mess jacket. 'Nerves, obviously, in both cases!'

The exquisite satisfaction afforded by this discovery to Mr. Tomkinson's brother officers found its natural outlet in a bear fight that threatened to become more or less general, and in the course of which I slid away unostentatiously to bed in Ballantyne's quarters, and took the precaution of barricading my door.

Next morning, when I got down to breakfast, I found Ballantyne and two or three others in the mess-room, and my first inquiry was for Private Harris.

'Oh, the poor chap's dead,' said Ballantyne; 'it's a very queer business altogether. I think he must have been wrong in the top story. The Doctor was with him when he came to out of the fit, or whatever it was, and O'Reilly—that's the Doctor y' know, Irish of course, and, by the way, poor Harris was an Irish-

HE CHALLENGED, AND GOT NO ANSWER

man too—says that he could only jibber at first, but then he got better, and he got out of him that when he had been on sentry-go for about half an hour, he happened to look up at the angle of the barrack wall near where it joins the magazine tower and saw a face looking at him over it. He challenged and got no answer, but the face just stuck there staring at him; he challenged again, and then, as O'Reilly said, he "just oop with his royfle and blazed at it."' Ballantyne was not above the common English delusion that he could imitate an Irish brogue.

'Well, what happened then?'

'Well, according to the poor devil's own story, the face just kept on looking at him and he had another shot at it, and "My God Almighty," he said to O'Reilly, "it was there always!" While he was saying that to O'Reilly he began to chuck another fit, and apparently went on chucking them till he died a couple of hours ago.'

'One result of it is,' said another man, 'that they couldn't get a man to go on sentry there alone last night. I expect we shall have to double the sentries there every night as long as we're here.'

'Silly asses!' remarked Tomkinson, but he said it without conviction.

After breakfast we went out to look at the wall by the magazine. It was about eleven feet high, with a coped top, and they told me there was a deep and wide dry ditch on the outside. A ladder was brought, and we examined the angle of the wall at which Harris said the face had appeared. He had made a beautiful shot, one of his bullets having flicked a piece off the ridge of the coping exactly at the corner.

'It's not the kind of shot a man would make if he had been drinking,' said Moffat, regretfully abandoning his first simple hypothesis; 'he must have been mad.'

'I wish I could find out who his people are,' said Brownlow, the adjutant, who had joined us; 'they found in his box a letter to him from his mother, but we can't make out the name of the place. By Jove, Yeates, you're an Irishman, perhaps you can help us.'

He handed me a letter in a dirty envelope. There was no address given, the contents were very short, and I may be forgiven if I transcribe them:—

'My dear Son, I hope you are well as this leaves me at present, thanks be to God for it. I am very much unaisy about the cow. She swelled up this morning, she ran in and was

frauding and I did not do but to run up for tom sweeney in the minute. We are thinking it is too much lairels or an eirub she took. I do not know what I will do with her. God help one that's alone with himself I had not a days luck since you went away. And so I remain 'YOUR FOND MOTHER.'

'Well, you don't get much of a lead from the cow, do you? And what the deuce is an eirub?'

'It's another way of spelling herb,' I said, turning over the envelope abstractedly. The post-mark was almost obliterated, but it struck me it might be construed into the word Skebawn.

'Look here,' I said suddenly, 'let me see Harris. It's just possible I may know something about him.'

The sentry's body had been laid in the dead-house near the hospital, and Brownlow fetched the key. It was a grim little whitewashed building, without windows, save a small one of lancet shape, high up in one gable, through which a streak of April sunlight fell sharp and slender on the whitewashed wall. The long figure of the sentry lay sheeted on a stone slab, and Brownlow, with his cap in his hand, gently uncovered the face.

I leaned over and looked at it, and as I looked there came back to me the remembrance of a wild, dark face, of the young man who had stood on my wheel shouting to the winning boat at the Lough Lonen Regatta.

'That's enough,' I said; 'I know him.'

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